

II. If you would profit, *prepare your hearts to the reading of the word.* The heart is an instrument that needs putting in tune. 1 Sam. vii. 3: "Prepare your hearts to the Lord." The heathen, as Plutarch notes, thought it indecent to be too hasty or rash in the service of their supposed deities. This preparation for reading consists in two things:

1. In summoning our thoughts together to attend to that solemn work we are going about. The thoughts are stragglers therefore rally them together. 2. In purging out those unclean affections which do indispose us to reading. Before we come to the water of life, let us cast away the poison of impure affections. Many come rashly to the reading of the word; and no wonder if they come without preparation, they go away without profit.

III. *Read the Scripture with reverence.* Think, every line you read, God is speaking to you. The ark wherein the law was put was overlaid with pure gold, and was carried on bars, that the Levites might not touch it. Why was this, but to breed in the people reverence to the law? When Ehud told Eglon he had a message to him from God, he arose from his throne.—(Judges iii. 20.) The word written is a message from Jehovah: with what veneration should we receive it!

IV. *Read the books of Scripture in order.* Though occurrences may sometimes divert our method, yet, for a *constant course*, it is best to observe an order in reading. Order is a help to memory.—We do not begin to read a friend's letter in the middle.

V. *Get a right understanding of Scripture.* Psalm cxix. 73: "Give me understanding, that I may learn thy commandments." Though there are some knots in Scripture which are not easily united, yet things essential to salvation the Holy Ghost hath plainly pointed out to us. The knowledge of the sense of the Scriptures is the first step to profit. In the Law, Aaron was first to light the lamps, and then to burn the incense; the lamp of the understanding must be first lighted before the affections can be inflamed. Get what knowledge you can by comparing Scripture,

by conferring with others, by using the best annotators. Without knowledge the Scripture is a *sealed book*; every line is too high for us; and if the word shoot above our head, it can never hit our heart.

VI. *Read the word with seriousness.*—If one go over the Scripture cursorily, says Erasmus, there is little good to got by it; but if he be serious in reading it, it is the savor of life; and well may we be serious if we consider the importance of those truths which are bound up in this sacred volume. Deut. xxxii. 47.; "It is not a vain thing for you: it is your life." If a letter were to be broken open and read, wherein a man's whole estate were concerned, how serious would he be in reading it! In the Scripture our salvation is concerned; it treats of the love of Christ, a serious subject. Christ hath loved mankind more than the angels that fell. (Hob. ii. 7.) The loadstone, indifferent to gold and pearl, draws the iron to it: thus Christ passed by the angels, who were of more noble extraction, and drew mankind to him. Christ loved us more than his own life; nay, though we had a hand in his death, yet he did not leave us out of his will. This is a love that *passeth knowledge*: who can read this without seriousness? The Scriptures speak of the mystery of faith, the eternal recompense, and the paucity of them that shall be saved. Matt. xx. 16: "Few chosen." One saith the names of all the good emperors of Rome might be engraved in a little ring; there are but (comparatively) few names in the Book of Life. The Scriptures speak of striving for heaven as in agony. (Luke xiii. 24.) It cautions us of falling short of the promised rest. (Heb. iv. 1.) It describes the horrors of the infernal torments, the worm and the fire. (Mark ix. 44.) Who can read this and not be serious? Some have light, feathery spirits; they run over the most weighty truths in haste, (like Israel who eat the Passover in haste,) and they are not benefited by the word. Read with a solemn, composed spirit. *Seriousness* is the Christian's ballast, which keeps him from being overturned with vanity.—[Rev. Thomas Watson, A. M.]